President: Sailing and Silence

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., May 6—The weather has been nearly perfect this weekend for taking minds off troubles—brilliant, hot sunshine bouncing off sparklingly clear waters, with just enough cool, dry breeze to keep the air from getting sticky.

President Nixon has been swimming, sailing, and walking on the beach. Only the incoming news reports that continually disclose new developments in the Watergate scandal tarnish the impression that he is enjoying an easygoing, relaxing weekend, and the Florida White House is saying almost nothing about those reports.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's press secretary and the highest-level White House official Mr. Nixon brought with him, has held only one full-fledged press briefing since the President flew to his compound here early Thursday afternoon.

He did announce at that one that Mr. Nixon was starting to repair his damaged White House staff by selecting Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. as an interim replacement for resigned chief of staff H.R. Haldeman.

Since that Friday noon briefing, however, there has been nothing but a string of no comments on Watergate developments.

The White House is not saying what the President thinks of E. Howard Hunt's grand jury testimony linking the CIA to the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office,

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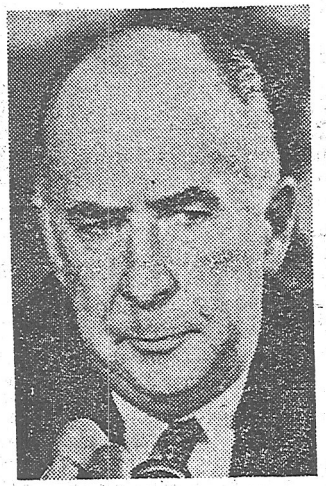

JOHN MITCHELL MARTHA MITCHELL PRESIDENT NIXON

. . . Mitchell calls his wife's suggestion that Mr. Nixon resign "ridiculous."

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or of former White House aide Egil Krogh's accepting full responsibility for that burglary, or of the indictment of paid White House agent Daniel Segretti, or of the phony campaign letter Segretti is alleged to have had mailed during the Florida primary, or of Mr. Nixon's former counsel John Dean's safe-deposit box containing some of Hunt's files, or of the Gallup poll indicating half the American public believes Mr. Nixon participated in a coverup of Watergate.

The lack of information is similar to last weekend, when Mr. Nixon secluded himself at Camp David in the Maryland mountains, sending occasionally for a once-trusted aide, and surrounded only by reports—which proved to be accurate—that he was about to make a major Watergate announcement.

This time, while there is the feeling on the part of many sources that the rush of events may soon force Mr. Nixon to make another public move in the Watergate affair, there is no indication that he is actively preparing to do so. The White House will say only that he is giving active consideration to repairing and rearranging the White House staff.

In his April 30 address to the nation, Mr. Nixon said, "Since March, when I first learned that the Watergate affair might in fact be more serious than I had been led to believe, it has claimed far too much of my time and attention . . . I must now turn my full attention once again to the larger duties of this office . . ."

If the President is doing that, White House officials are, again, not talking about it. No one higher in rank than Ziegler is known to have come to talk with the President, though he has been in cable contact with Henry A. Kissinger in the Soviet Union and he is receiving regular national security briefings.

And when Mr. Nixon went to Grand Cay island Saturday afternoon, he took along no one but his friend C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo and Paul Keyes, former executive producer of the television gag show, "Laugh-In."

Even Mrs. Nixon and daughter Julie Eisenhower stayed behind at the Key Biscayne compound. Keyes, who flew down from Washington with Mr. Nixon aboard the presidential jet, is working on the entertainment for an upcoming White House party for returned Vietnam prisoners of war.

The official postings which go up on the Florida White House press office bulletin board twice a day talk mostly of bill signings, proclamations of "World Trade Week," minor appointments, and how the President has been "on the telephone" to Washington and presumably elsewhere.

Saturday night, after dinner and a swim, Mr. Nixon went for a two-hour moonlight cruise aboard the Sea Lion II, a 53-foot fishing boat owned by New York industralist Robert Abplanalp, who also owns all 125 acres of Grand Cay island, 110 miles from Key Biscayne.

Today, the President spent several hours fishing off Grand Cay, before returning to Key Biscayne.

The White House press office reported that this morning the President was at work in Abplanalp's seaside home but would not disclose what he was working on, except to say he had placed several calls to Key Biscayne, talking with Ziegler and others.

Mr. Nixon is not expected to return to Washington before Monday afternoon at the earliest.